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The Khmer Way of Exile: Lessons from Three Indochinese Wars

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Introduction: The Khmer Way of Exile

The Cambodian peasant economy has been a powerful force for continuity in Khmer society over the millenia. The once imposing power of the Khmer imperial state had declined over the the preceding millenium, but the conservative peasant base continued to sustain the twin pillars of Khmer society — the Khmer monarchy and the Theravada Buddhist monarchy — through the 1960s. Mysticism and survival are uniquely intertwined in the person of the Khmer monarch: as official owner of all the land, he feeds the body; as the God-King, he feeds the spirit. With the rituals of daily life revolving around Buddhism and farming, and with the King in his dual role as head-of-state and head-of-religion, the King has for many centuries represented the symbolic center of the Khmer nation. Since before World War II, this symbolic power has been embodied in a person named Norodom Sihanouk.

At the age of 67, Norodom Sihanouk has been at the center of Southeast Asian politics for fifty years. Placed on the throne of Cambodia at age eighteen by his French colonial masters, the durable monarch has seen countless prime ministers, scores of regimes, and not a few states come and go — in Cambodia alone. Although it has been thirty years since he abdicated as King and twenty years since his regime was overthrown, he is now positioning himself to return to Cambodia as head-of-state in a new coalition government apparently emerging from several years of incredibly Byzantine negotiations. While journalistic commentary commonly prefaces his name with descriptors such as “unreliable,” “mercurial” and “elusive,” his survival amidst a half-century of extended chaos speaks to the power of the symbols he commands.

This half-century of chaos is delimited by historians into three principal conflicts: the First Indochinese War (1941-1955), mainly between the Vietnamese and the French; the Second Indochinese War (1955-1975), between the Vietnamese and the Americans; and the Third Indochinese War (1975-present), between the Vietnamese and a Sino-Khmer alliance, with many additional players in all three wars. One of the most interesting

aspects of collective Cambodian political behavior over this period is recurring use of the technique of the exile government — with Sihanouk at the center of exile action in three successive wars. Such a pattern invites analysis. Who will prevail in the current struggle for power in Cambodia? How have Khmer leaders used the government-in-exile technique to defend their rule against stronger foreign powers? What is the relationship between the success of an exile state organization and the symbolic attributes of the nationhood inhering in the social formations of the Khmer people? We will explore these questions by looking to Cambodian history for clues.

The Byzantine maneuvering of politicians in the Third Indochinese War is entirely consistent with the patterns and dynamics of regional political interaction in all three Indochinese conflicts. In the First Indochinese War, Sihanouk skillfully used the existence of rebels and exile organizations on the left and the right of the Cambodian political spectrum to pressure the French colonialists into concessions hastening Cambodian independence. In the Second Indochinese War, Sihanouk was overthrown by his ministers and promptly formed an exile government with his former adversary, the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP), also known as the "Khmer Rouge." In the Third Indochinese War, the Vietnamese overthrew the Khmer Rouge state of Democratic Kampuchea, bringing to power a group of Khmer exiles from Democratic Kampuchea, and prompting Sihanouk to again form an exile government with the KCP.

What motivates Khmer leaders to form exile governments? In principle, at least three distinct abstract purposes suggest themselves as possible explanations. In the first war, anti-colonialism against the French was cited by all participants as the principal motive; in the second war, domestic rivalry among numerous Khmer factions was clearly an important factor; and in the third and recent war, struggle against the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnamese troops was touted by the three main resistance factions as the over-riding reason for fighting. In practice, however, the motives are much less clearly defined than the three clear-cut explanations of anti-colonialism, domestic rivalry, and anti-occupation. In fact, elements of all three purposes played important roles in each of the three Indochinese Wars of the twentieth century.

In that first Indochinese struggle, it was not only the Khmer radicals who resisted the legal, French colonial Cambodian government. Following the French reassertion of colonial power in Indochina after World War II, Cambodians across the political spectrum struggled for independence from France.

Radical and conservative groups alike resorted to paramilitary action against French interests, raising the pressure on the colonialists and creating an opening that young King Sihanouk skillfully exploited. Leading independence-minded politicians of the left and the right in Cambodian politics soon found themselves frozen out of the action by Sihanouk's mastery of his position as the symbolic center of the nation. He succeeded in winning independence from France for Cambodia at the Geneva Conference in 1954, a triumph so complete that he continued to dominate Cambodian politics through the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, Sihanouk practiced an authoritarian politics of the center, including a liberal employment of security forces that reduced the internal Cambodian left to a dwindling extinction. Their defenselessness against the government convinced some Cambodian revolutionaries that armed resistance was necessary.

In the early years of the Second Indochinese War, King (later, Prince) Sihanouk managed to insulate his country from the worst of the violence raking Vietnam and Laos. When the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) finally launched armed struggle in 1968, they had little success in the first two years on their own. But growing discontent among the Khmer elite over Vietnamese occupation of large tracts in the eastern provinces of the country soon led to a military coup against Sihanouk in 1970. The KCP leaped at the opportunity to form a broad partnership with the overthrown prince and assorted left-leaning social democratic elements. This proved to be the key to success, and the undoing of the nearly two thousand years of tradition represented by Sihanouk. Under the banner of the exiled Royal Government for the National Unification of Kampuchea (GRUNK), the Khmer communists marched to victory in 1975 only to abruptly liquidate their partners and seize absolute power. The KCP had learned well the lesson of the First Indochinese War. The center was necessary to attain victory, but it must be destroyed the moment victory is achieved or else it may turn and destroy the revolution.

The Third Indochinese War came close on the heels of the second. In 1979, only three years and two days after the founding of their state, Democratic Kampuchea, Khmer Rouge aggression against Vietnam precipitated their rout from power by the Vietnamese army. This time, more reluctantly, the Khmer Rouge gradually maneuvered to assemble a remarkably similar "coalition" partnership consisting of Prince Sihanouk, social democratic elements, and other groups. True to their hubris-soaked form, the Khmer Rouge did not bother to wait until victory to

begin liquidating their coalition partners. The behavior of the Khmer Rouge toward their coalition partners in the Third Indochinese War has been consistent with their strategy in the Second Indochinese War. When they are in power the policy is systematic purge and in the chaos of wartime the policy is random ambush. Despite this fratricidal spirit among the coalition partners, the coalition appeared to be moving slowly toward an international settlement which would bring all or part of it to power in Phnom Penh. Exactly which part or parts end up coming to power in Cambodia is crucial to the future social order of the country.

History may be on the verge of repeating itself in Cambodia. But which history will it be? That of the First Indochinese War, with its relatively — and I emphasize *relative*, for when in power Sihanouk did not shrink from the use of force — benign centrist solution? Or, that of the Second Indochinese War, an extremist solution followed by purges, execution and starvation on a grand scale? In a number of respects the situation of the Khmer exile community in the Third Indochinese War resembles that of the First Indochinese War more than that of the Second Indochinese War. The outcome for Cambodia of the Third Indochinese War will be determined by the balance of forces within the disintegrating exile regime, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), between the CGDK factions and the existing weak government in Phnom Penh, and among the interested regional and global powers. Khmer politicians have a history of successfully using the technique of a government-in-exile, if not to resolve conflict, at least to transform the conditions of violence from external threat to civil war. It appears that in at least this one respect, the outcome of the Third Indochinese War will parallel that of the first two: exile groups seem likely to achieve national power in Cambodia. In other respects, the outcome of the Third Indochinese War is likely to be unique in the history of Indochina's conflicts.

Khmer Issarak Strategy in First Indochinese War

As the authority of the French empire collapsed during World War II, Cambodians anxious for independence seized the opportunity to establish a free government. With some intrigue on the part of the Japanese, early in 1945 a group of Khmer partisans led by Son Ngoc Thanh succeeded in setting up a short-lived "free democratic" Cambodian government. At the end of the war, however, the allies decided that French colonial forces remaining in Indochina were well-positioned to disarm and arrest the Japanese occupation forces. The French also arrested

"trouble-makers" like Son Ngoc Thanh. The sequence of rising hopes for independence followed by colonial re-occupation set the stage for the First Indochinese War, and spawned resistance movements throughout Indochina. Depending on how one counts — and who is counting — there were at least two, maybe three, four, or more identifiable Cambodian exile governments during the First Indochinese War. The most important of these exile groups were collectively known as the "Khmer Issarak" (or "Free Khmer") even though the so-named groups represented various wide-ranging and often completely contradictory interests from republican to communist, Siamese-leaning to Vietnamese-leaning.

Some of the conflicting tendencies in Cambodian politics that helped push Cambodia toward independence from France after World War II are illustrated in the activities of two men with confusingly similar names: Son Ngoc Thanh and Son Ngoc Minh. To add to the confusion, both men led largely ineffectual rival exile governments on the right and the left (respectively) during the First Indochinese War. While their exile governments never came close to achieving national power, they played vital roles in the Cambodian movement for independence from France.

Son Ngoc Thanh was the more prominent of the two, representing the interests of the French-educated intellectual class with Western preferences. His career is bracketed with two equally brief and disastrous stints as Prime Minister, first in the wartime free Khmer government of 1945, and then in the wartime Khmer Republican government of 1972. He had earned the eternal ire of the King by pushing Sihanouk aside in forming the 1945 free democratic government, and Sihanouk returned the favor by seeing Thanh imprisoned and exiled to France after the war. Shortly after his return to Cambodia in 1951, Thanh fled the capitol and formed a right-leaning exile government in the northern border province of Siem Reap.¹ Although Sihanouk repeatedly sent his army to attack Thanh's bases, with Thai assistance Thanh persevered for several years. Finally after failing to win recognition at the Geneva Convention of 1954, he gave up his exile quest and accepted new patrons. Thanh himself was irrepressible in his quest for national leadership, variously allying himself with the Japanese, the Siamese, the Vietnamese, and the Americans in repeated attempts to achieve the leadership role he believed was his destiny. Although foreign sponsorship seems to be a prerequisite for the success of a Khmer exile government, and though Thanh clearly understood this, still he lacked a vital ingredient: the symbolic Khmer center.

Son Ngoc Minh faced the internal legitimacy problem to

an even greater degree. A former Buddhist monk from the lost imperial Khmer provinces now known as southern Vietnam, Minh selected his *nom de guerre* in part to evoke Son Ngoc Thanh's well-established rebel image and in part to ameliorate his possibly suspect Vietnamese connections. This was a legitimate concern, because until 1951 the Cambodian communist operated largely as a branch of the Vietnamese party. But the Khmer communist movement had grown considerably since the French returned in 1946, particularly but not exclusively in the eastern provinces along the border with Vietnam. By the time the Khmer communists split from the Vietnamese Workers Party in 1951 to form the independent Khmer People's Party, Minh had achieved leadership of a vibrant movement,² and by 1952 he became President of the little-remembered exile Khmer Resistance Government. However, Minh's problem with internal legitimacy within Cambodia would prove disastrous in the negotiations leading to Cambodian independence, where Sihanouk would derisively dismiss Minh's exile movement with the labels "Khmer Rouge" and "Khmer Viet Minh," evoking both their communist and Vietnamese connections.

Sihanouk deftly maneuvered among the various tendencies of these exile governments, playing them off one against another and against interested foreign powers. He did this so expertly that he managed to achieve near-dictatorial powers. Near the climax of his "Royal Crusade for Independence," in mid-1953 Sihanouk went into voluntary "exile" first in Thailand and then in Siem Reap province, the same province where Son Ngoc Thanh with the aid of Thai authorities proclaimed an independence movement. The French already feared that the rightist pro-Siamese Son Ngoc Thanh was allied to the leftist pro-Vietnamese Son Ngoc Minh. The terrifying if absurd vision of a united front among Cambodian monarchists, democrats and communists along with their respective Vietnamese, Laotian, and Siamese allies moved the French. Within a matter of months they yielded to the King's demands for autonomy. Thus did Sihanouk learn a lesson about using one's enemies. It was a lesson which would serve him poorly in the next Indochinese War.

The French sued for peace, and the interested parties converged on Geneva early in 1954 to begin positioning for the settlement. In the days leading up to the Geneva Conference a flurry of activity continued to increase the pressure on the beleaguered French government. On May 3, Son Ngoc Minh formally demanded representation for his Khmer Resistance Government at the conference table in Geneva.³ As if to underline the seriousness of the resistance, on May 7, the eve of the

conference, the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu fell to General Giap's siege. At the opening session of the conference the next morning, Vietnamese delegate Pham Van Dong forcefully represented the demands of Minh's exile government for recognition, a demand rejected both by the French and Royal Khmer delegates. This contributed to an immediate deadlock of the conference, leading soon to the collapse of the French government. Action then shifted as a new French government emerged and its leader, Pierre Mendes-France, began negotiating behind the scenes with China's Chou En-Lai to find the solution to the puzzle. The Chinese, while eager to see a diffusion of colonial power on their southern flank, had conflicting interests. On the one hand, the modern interests of proletarian internationalism dictated unwavering Chinese support for the battlefield sacrifices of their Vietnamese brothers. On the other hand, the ancient interests of imperial power dictated that whatever was necessary be done to prevent consolidation of an independent Vietnam holding sway over all Indochina. Traditional interests would carry the day. After a quiet meeting in southern China between Chou En-lai and Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong received new instructions in Geneva. There would be partition in Vietnam, and there would be no recognition for the resistance movement in Kampuchea, despite the fact that resistance forces held fully two-thirds of the county-side in both Vietnam and Kampuchea. The resentments and suspicions sown among Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian communists at the conference ending the First Indochinese War simmered and smouldered for twenty years before exploding into combat in the Third Indochinese War.

In sum, for a time Son Tgoc Thanh's Issarak exile government of the First Indochinese War did find an external host in Thailand, but the Siamese proved uncommitted in the long run and provided no serious financial or military backing to the would-be Khmer rebels. The Vietnamese likewise provided encouragement and guidance for their protegee, Son Ngoc Minh's Khmer Resistance Government, but pulled that support the moment their own strategic interests so dictated. This should be viewed as a major factor in the failure of the Cambodian exile governments to achieve power on their own terms in the First Indochinese War. An enthusiastic and steadfast external patron seems to be necessary for a Khmer exile government to come to power.

The lack of internal legitimacy among the populace must be viewed as a secondary strategic reason for the failure of the Khmer exile governments in the First Indochinese War. They

could not command the allegiance of the symbolic center. Viewed in terms of their historical significance, these exile governments were important not in and of themselves, but rather as foils for Sihanouk to use in his fencing with domineering foreign powers. With the "Khmer Viet Minh" forces on the left, and the "Khmer Issarak" forces on the right, Sihanouk naturally commanded the center. Because the traditional locus of political and religious authority resided in the King, Sihanouk easily prevailed. It was a lesson that most of the participants never forgot: even if you out-organize the opposition and stake out the moral high-ground, you must control the symbols of nationhood or you will succeed neither with the Cambodian people nor with the international community.

Khmer Rouge Strategy in Second Indochinese War

The principal issue behind the Second Indochinese War concerned who would rule the Vietnamese people. Sihanouk had struggled valiantly through the 1960s to insulate his tiny Royal State of Cambodia from the devastation of the Vietnamese-American war, but after his overthrow in 1970 the flames engulfed Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk had been battling a small domestic guerilla insurgency led by the heretofore inept Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP), but when the deposed monarch abruptly joined forces with the communists in the exiled Royal Government of Khmer National Unification, their movement exploded across the nation and literally tore the existing social order to bits. It was an impressive achievement, considering that Pol Pot's KCP had been founded only a mere ten years before.

In 1961, the ten year old Khmer People's Party was reconstituted as the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP), albeit one that consisted of little more than a central committee. The Khmer People's Party had been decimated by Sihanouk's security forces, aided by well-placed spies through the 1950s. The tiny new KCP had no effect on the inability of the party to recruit a mass grass-roots following in the cities or any significant following at all among the predominant ethnic Khmer rural population. The general failure of attempts to organize among both the urban and rural populations lent support to the Vietnamese Communist Party analysis of the situation, which Son Ngoc Minh's now-defunct Khmer People's Party had shared. This line held that Cambodia had not reached the requisite stage of socio-economic development to support socialist revolution, and therefore the proper role of progressive elements of Cambodian society was to reinforce Sihanouk's anti-imperialist (read anti-U.S.) tendencies, and support the revolutionary struggle in

Vietnam. This analysis was widely held within the Kampuchean Communist Party, although it was not shared by a crucial leadership clique. Pol Pot (#1 in the KCP) and Ieng Sary (#3) believed that armed struggle would ultimately be required. Nonetheless, the majority opinion prevailed and the principal activities pursued by the party in early 1960s concerned propaganda and agitation, mainly among the public and private schools of the larger cities in Cambodia. The party was in no way prepared for war when events early in 1967 forced them to revise their strategy from political struggle to armed struggle.

What was essentially a limited tax rebellion among peasants in the northwestern agricultural province of Battambang in January 1967 became a major turning point in the history of the KCP. While the party held fast to the line that the people were not ready for armed revolt, peasant masses more or less spontaneously took up arms against the government. Thus, the so-called Samlaut Rebellion presented the KCP with a species of challenge which is the death of many organizations: the basic doctrinal assumption was suddenly and undeniably refuted by reality. The Khmer Rouge successfully adapted by claiming the rebellion as their own and declaring (retroactive) armed struggle. These events marked the beginning of a two year period of slow and only marginally effective guerrilla struggle by a party which had not seriously begun to contemplate, let alone prepare for, war. Samlaut also had a very important internal political consequence within the Kampuchean Communist Party: it reinforced the position of the "Pol Pot" group in the Central Committee, who had argued that only armed rebellion could break the combined grips of feudal, colonial, commercial and imperial enemies of Kampuchea. This turn of events helped entrench Pol Pot's allies in key positions throughout the revolutionary apparatus of the Kampuchean Communist Party.

The Khmer Rouge generally proved inept at exploiting the splendid opening offered by peasant resentment in Battambang and other provinces. A little ground was gained in remote and historically rebellious areas, but at the rate sustained in 1968 and 1969, it would have been a very long struggle, one not at all certain of success. Yet the rate of change in Cambodia was about to go off of the scale. The 1970 *coup d'etat* against Norodom Sihanouk by Sirik Matak and Lon Nol was a watershed event in the political history of the Second Indochinese War, for this act cataclysmically transformed the international strategic landscape of the region, with catastrophic consequences for the existing social order in Kampuchea. Prior to the coup, the Khmer Rouge had struggled against Sihanouk's regime alone with

virtually no assistance from their supposedly fraternal brother parties in the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and North and South Vietnam. After the coup, Sihanouk, the PRC, and the Vietnamese all suddenly found it in their interests to be of considerable assistance to the struggling Cambodian revolutionaries. The *coup* also set the stage for formation of a coalition government-in-exile which would come to power after a vicious five-year civil war.

Norodom Sihanouk was the most important element in the victory, and the key to the entire Khmer Rouge strategy. Sihanouk could deliver both Khmer peasants and Western nations. The Vietnamese were also very important in the new strategy, for when Lon Nol and Sirik Matak suddenly changed Sihanouk's policy of covert cooperation with the Vietnamese revolutionaries to a policy of confrontation and ultimatum, the Vietnamese did not hesitate to turn and pummel the new-born Khmer Republic. Notwithstanding repeated Khmer Rouge claims of military prowess, this allowed the Khmer Rouge a relatively smooth cruise to victory. The government of the People's Republic of China had also found it convenient to cooperate with Sihanouk's government, but after Sihanouk was deposed there was no longer any reason to support the now clearly reactionary Cambodian regime and continue to neglect proper fraternal relations with the Kampuchean Communist Party. The Chinese proved to be the most important ally in the long run when they provided a lifeboat for the apocalypse ten years later. Both the Vietnamese and the Chinese communists had tacitly and otherwise assisted Sihanouk in his war with the Kampuchean communists, and so it was an astonishing transformation of the international strategic landscape when these banes of the KCP's existence suddenly became eager allies in the Khmer Rouge plan to seize power.

The KCP instituted a number of tactical innovations in their strategy to cope with the portentous changes in the political terrain of Southeast Asia wrought by the 1970 *coup d'état* in Cambodia. The most important innovations concerned the rapid construction of internal, external, and international united fronts. This complex of three interlocking organizations formed the public face of the revolution. The internal united front with Sihanouk — called FUNK (the National United Front for Kampuchea) — functioned mainly as a recruitment arm, but was perceived by the Khmer Rouge as completely irrelevant upon victory. The external united front, the nominal exile government, came to be called by the acronym, GRUNK (Royal Government of Khmer National Unification); GRUNK functioned to legitimize the

revolution in the regional and international arenas. Accordingly, in theory, the leadership of GRUNK was evenly divided between followers of Sihanouk and followers of the KCP. In practice, however, Sihanouk's people got mostly diplomatic posts and titles conferring no real authority within the revolution. The international united front — a putative alliance among the revolutionaries in Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea call UFTIP (the United Front of the Three Indochinese Peoples) — was the least significant of the fronts. Nominally representing the common interests of the Indochinese revolutionary movements in resisting "U.S. imperialism," UFTIP was in reality a chimera in the shadows of which Laotian, Vietnamese, and Khmer revolutionary organizations separately pursued their individual self-interested ends. The KCP benefited from this liaison, to some extent from the propaganda advantage, but principally from a cornucopia of military aid from the Vietnamese communists. The three united front organizations played crucial social, political, propaganda, diplomatic, and recruitment functions, but real power on the ground in Cambodia was always held by the army: PFLANK (the People's National Liberation Armed Forces of Kampuchea).

PFLANK was always completely under the control of members of the secret Central Committee of the KCP. However, winning the war was only the first task assigned to PFLANK. The most crucial political issue in Kampuchea became who controls the security apparatus. The Central Committee of the Kampuchean Communist Party maintained direct personal control of the army units, but exactly which members of the Central Committee held command became a life and death matter in the months following victory. In 1970-1973, however, it was Vietnamese military aid that kept the revolutionary organizations growing. This military aid came not only in the form of advisors and arms, but in many cases direct military intervention to fight the fights of the young PFLANK, which until 1973 was not at all prepared to shoulder the burden of the civil war with its own resources.

For many in academia and the press, the romanticism in the image of a rebel prince leading a peasant revolution against a corrupt neo-colonial quisling regime was too much to resist.⁴ But Sihanouk's attempt to relive his triumph in using exile governments during his "Royal Crusade for Independence" from France in the early 1950s was foredoomed to a humiliating failure. The Khmer Rouge used the King with a mastery and subtlety seldom seen in modern political history. This failure did much to reinforce Sihanouk's image as an unreliable vainglorious fool. It also did much to enshrine the Khmer Rouge external

perception and internal self-image as infallably brilliant politicians and revolutionaries. Sihanouk may yet surprise his critics; so may the Khmer Rouge.

The practice of the Khmer Rouge in the Second Indochinese War was to unify the country under the Sihanouk-led banners of FUNK and GRUNK, and then to liquidate all contenders for power with their army, the PFLANK. This was reflected in Khmer Rouge theory in the notion of "mastery." Central to their doctrine, mastery was expressed in the overblown self-confidence of their peasant troops. One gets a better sense of the radicalism of the Khmer Rouge revolution, and how this psychological sense of power evolved in the movement, by seeing how they created and used social institutions to transform the social and political culture of the nation in a very brief period.

FUNK was the key to controlling the peasantry. The function of FUNK was to convince the deeply traditional and conservative peasantry that the revolution represented the interests of the monarchy and the monarchy; but there was much more. Their methods demonstrate that the Khmer Rouge were social engineers who planned ahead. With a view to the future, the Khmer Rouge focused on children and young adults. One of the many organizations operated by FUNK was the Patriotic Youth Organization (PYA). The enormous number of young peasants who joined the revolution out of respect for the appeals of the exiled former King Sihanouk and the traditional values that he embodied were funneled into the PYA. Naturally, the values these youngsters had been raised with were considerably at odds with the inner program of the KCP Central Committee. The Khmer Rouge devised the PYA system to winnow a few hopeful cases from the masses being readied to die for the revolution. A system of PYA youth training camps was founded, where the young peasants were drilled in elementary military technique and basic revolutionary doctrine. As one analyst reported at the time, "returning youngsters fiercely condemned religion and custom, rejected paternal authority and showed a marked confidence in mechanical weapons and a rejection of the mystical."⁵ Apparently this training was effective, and the combat performance of these child-soldiers impressed even seasoned warriors. As Sihanouk put it, the child-soldiers were trained to believe that the society against which they fought — and which they came to understand that Sihanouk more than anyone else represented — was "despicable, contemptible, corrupt, unjust and oppressive in the extreme."⁶

Those who distinguished themselves in battle and were deemed to possess potential for the party might be advanced to

membership in the Alliance of Communist Youth of Kampuchea (known by its Khmer acronym, Yuv. K.K.). As an official organ of the KCP, the Yuv. K.K. was a covert organization, entirely secret. The 1973 inaugural issue of the Yuv. K.K. propaganda organ stated the aim of the organization as "causing the adoption" among the youth of Kampuchea "a new revolutionary worldview."⁷ These young warriors, known in Khmer Rouge party lexicon as "the dictatorial instrument of the party," became the shock troops of the new order, assigned after the war to herd the masses of workers from work site to work site. In 1975 victory was declared under the GRUNK flag, but PFLANK was in control. The PFLANK was the cutting edge of revolution, but raw force was combined with sophisticated organization and propaganda by the theorists and social engineers of Khmer Rouge revolution.

In summary, the Kampuchean Communist Party strategy for the Second Indochinese War involved forming an exile coalition government, marginalizing the coalition while winning the civil war, and seizing absolute power. This series of sophisticated procedures secured the transformation of their exile government into a sovereign nation-state during and after the Second Indochinese War. The first problem was to gain control of the key symbolic cultural icons of the nation — the King, the Buddhist monks, the capitol, and the ruins in the countryside. These in hand, the process of changing the association in people's minds between the symbols of nationhood and the revolution could begin in earnest. This elaborate program (known as "De-Sihanoukization") began in some of the liberated areas as early as 1973.⁸ Simultaneously, the process of physically liquidating all competing apparati within the FUNK organization commenced. This began with liquidation of all ethnic Vietnamese serving in the revolutionary organizations, and proceeded outward in waves through first the various front organizations and finally the party itself. All who did not maintain the confidence of the KCP security apparatus would be "disappeared." Effective control of the FUNK organization gradually came into the hands of the Khmer Rouge through this kind of creeping administrative *coup d'etat*, so that eventually all activity except Sihanouk's diplomatic corps in Beijing was controlled on the ground in-country by trusted party members. Norodom Sihanouk, while no more than a figurehead, provided the revolution with unproblematical possession of the symbolic center of the nation. This brought along not only the people of Cambodia, but also the international community. When this had been accomplished, it was possible to begin the marginalization of the internal diplomatic cover represented by Sihanouk's entourage in China. Once

this was done, Cambodia belonged to Pol Pot. The resulting state of Democratic Kampuchea, founded in the wake of the KCP victory, would shock the world with its extremism and start the Third Indochinese War.

CGDK Strategy in Third Indochinese War

On the surface, the two main questions in the Third Indochinese War were 1) When would the Vietnamese army leave Cambodia; and 2) What will happen to the Cambodian regime that the Vietnamese plan to leave behind? The Vietnamese answered the first of these two questions when they announced in April 1989 that they would complete the pullout of their troops within six months. The second question doesn't have so simple an answer, but the resolution of the first question set a clock to ticking toward an answer to the second.

The end of 1978 came grimly to a belligerent Democratic Kampuchea. After years of terror and mismanagement under the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian people were in no mood to assist in the defense of the nation. Repeated rounds of concentric purges throughout all levels of the KCP for more than five years had left it in no condition to lead a defense of the homeland. When the Vietnamese finally responded to Pol Pot's border raids with a full scale invasion, they found a nation ready for collapse. During the week before Christmas, the Vietnamese used heavy armor and artillery with air support to attack and decimate the massed Democratic Kampuchean defenses in Svay Rieng and Kompong Thom provinces. Invading Vietnamese commanders then drove straight for Phnom Penh, skirting strong points of the Democratic Kampuchean army, and aiming for the heart of the nation. The invasion force took the capital on January 7, 1979, less than two weeks after the start of the campaign. The government of Democratic Kampuchea literally took to the hills, retreating with essential political and administrative personnel to mountain redouts in remote areas of the Thai-Kampuchean border. Pol Pot correctly calculated that his forces could hold out indefinitely in this traditional rebel region.

The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), founded in the wake of the Vietnamese occupation in 1979, had its origins in an exile movement sponsored by Vietnam and largely made up of former officers, cadre and citizens of Democratic Kampuchea who fled to Vietnam to escape Pol Pot's purges during the late 1970s. In the decade between the invasion of Cambodia and the decision to change the name of the People's Republic of Kampuchea to the State of Cambodia, the leaders of that hapless captive nation-state bravely toiled at such recovery as they could man-

age in the killing fields left behind by Pol Pot's retreating revolution.⁹ Considerable progress was made in improving the welfare and conditions of the Khmer people. Virtually all of the excesses of the Khmer Rouge era were eliminated, and a market-based economic recovery and a revival of religion and tourism has been brought underway.¹⁰

Nonetheless, the now-exiled government of Democratic Kampuchea continued to exist and resist. During the summer of 1979 a tribunal in Phnom Penh convicted Pol Pot and his second-in-command, Ieng Sary, of genocide. Then, in the first of what has become an almost ritualistic annual autumn challenge to the credentials of the Democratic Kampuchean representatives to the United Nations, the Chairman of the People's Republic of Kampuchea's Council of State, Heng Samrin, argued that the record of Khmer Rouge brutality disqualified them from governing. The United Nations credentials committee, however, decided to award the Cambodian seat to the representatives of Democratic Kampuchea, in respect of the principle that nation-states shall not be overthrown by neighboring force of arms. Thus did Pol Pot survive as the leader of the legal and "legitimate" government of Cambodia. But not entirely without challenge from the exile community.

On October 9, 1979, Son Sann crossed over the Thai border a short distance into Cambodia, and declared the existence on Khmer soil of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). Son Sann had been a leader in Sihanouk's governments in the 1960s, at one point briefly rising to the post of Prime Minister, and returned to Cambodian politics during the period of the Khmer Republic in the early 1970s. Under the banner of the KPNLF, Sann proceeded to unify a number of rebel bands that had been operating along the Thai-Cambodian frontier since the end of the Second Indochinese War, obtaining in the process a string of strategic bases ringing the Cambodian border. Sann hoped to offer himself as a "third force," an alternative between the Vietnamese supported government in Phnom Penh and the Khmer Rouge. Unfortunately, the very nature of his command — essentially a dispersed collection of armed bandits, mercenaries, ousted generals, the odd idealist, and assorted riff-raff — invited chaos and insubordination. The resulting contention was so intense that by 1981 command squabbles had robbed his organization of virtually all military capability to operate in-country.

Norodom Sihanouk had been held under house arrest throughout the reign of Democratic Kampuchea, but soon after the rout of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 he managed to escape their

control. Operating independently once again, he immediately began to position himself as the compromise solution to the Vietnamese invasion and "puppet" regime. He reasoned that he had worked with the Vietnamese before and could do it again; likewise, he had lots of old friends among the Chinese. No other internationally acceptable party could claim such credentials. But he was mistaken. Sihanouk miscalculated the extent of support which would be offered by the People's Republic of China to their fraternal friends in the Kampuchean Communist Party, apparently forgetting that when Deng Xiaoping welcomed a triumphant Pol Pot and Ieng Sary to Beijing in October 1977, the relationship between the communist parties of Cambodia and China was described as "Unbreakable." According to one analyst, this description had been used only once before, in the case of China's close alliance with Albania.¹¹ Sihanouk also miscalculated with respect to the Vietnamese. During the First and Second Indochinese Wars, Sihanouk had closely cooperated with Vietnamese leaders like Pham Van Dong in repelling first the French and then the Americans. But at the outset of the Third Indochinese War, Pham Van Dong began publicly declaring that his old friend Sihanouk was "a finished man."¹² What must have shocked Sihanouk the most, however, was the fact that immediately after the Vietnamese invasion, the United States of America threw its support behind Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. President Carter's National Security Advisor Brzezinski recalled that in the spring of 1979, "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. I encouraged the Thai to help the D.K."¹³ The Reagan administration continued this covert policy. Soon Pol Pot's guerilla's were happily modeling US-issue combat gear for the international press. With the US, the PRC, the USSR, and the Vietnamese all studiously attempting to ignore him, Sihanouk decided by the beginning of 1981 that he had better reconsider his "lone wolf" approach. Soon he was talking with Son Sann about forming a united front.

Meanwhile, Pol Pot took a dim view of Sihanouk's and Sann's claims and armies. Moreover, the Democratic Kampuchean resistance in the remote hills along the Thai-Kampuchean border continued to suffer attrition and lose territory to the Vietnamese invasion forces. The National Army of Democratic Kampuchea was increasingly dispersed, disorganized, and demoralized. By 1981 their strength was down to less than fifty thousand fighters, a fraction of their pre-invasion force, with no heavy weapons and irregular supplies. The continuing decline of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) and their rather complete lack of success in defending the territorial

observers to take the "Kampuchean Problem" seriously. Pol Pot's NADK army spent much of its time attacking Sihanouk's Army of Nationalist Sihanoukians (ANS) and Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), who were busy unifying and then re-segregating their respective armies. Son Sann lost the leadership role of his faction several times in "camp coups" by his subordinates, only to invariably regain command at some later date due to continued disagreement in KPNLF ranks. Sihanouk has "quit" as head of the coalition government several times, and threatens to quit with a dizzying regularity. Pol Pot has repeatedly publicly "retired to academia" as part of the Democratic Kampuchean negotiating strategy to de-emphasize their unpopular leader, though it is unclear how much longer this tactic will remain effective. It is remarkable that despite this fractious and irregular behavior, the coalition seems to be progressing toward achievement of its goals.

One of the key elements of Khmer Rouge strategy during the Second Indochinese War had been total secrecy and concealment of the revolutionary apparatus. This almost obsessive concern with secrecy was so religiously applied that it extended to years of denial that there was a communist party behind the peasant revolution. This avoided frightening simple peasants, or confusing international supporters who were committed to non-communist members of FUNK and GRUNK. Known only as "Angkar" (The Organization), the communists went through the entire war without publicizing their program beyond the ranks of their own committed cadre. Not until September 1977, two and one half years after victory, did the Khmer Rouge officially reveal the existence of the Kampuchean Communist Party.

This tactic has been adopted for the Third Indochinese War, as well. However, to conceal the existence of the heretofore ruling party apparatus, and convincingly deny the existence of the party, extreme measures were required. On December 7, 1981, the Kampuchean Communist Party announced that it was officially dissolving itself. This had both tactical and strategic advantages. It's harder for enemies to destroy an organization that officially doesn't exist, and the potential to scare the Cambodian people with frightening memories of the prior regime was reduced with the covert approach. Moreover, this device allowed potential coalition partners to save face by arguing that they were not joining up with communists.

Throughout their years of revolution and power, roughly from 1968 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge showed no mercy on their opponents, real or suspected. The pattern has persisted since the formation of the CGDK in 1982. Population control is draconian

integrity of Democratic Kampchea against Vietnamese designs began to alarm their Chinese sponsors. Moreover, the apparent success of Vietnam in imposing suzerainty over the entire Indochinese Peninsula, and her representatives' frequent and loud assertions regarding the "irreversibility of the situation," began to inspire alarm in some Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. Thailand was especially alarmed, finding its armed forces in combat with Vietnamese forces in pursuit of retreating or retired resistance guerillas and base areas. The Thai's had already been considerably inconvenienced by the Khmer refugee problem along the border. With the arrival of the army of the traditional Vietnamese enemy at and crossing Thai-Cambodian the border, the annoyance turned into an active search for ways to push the Cambodians back to Cambodia and the Vietnamese back to Vietnam.

Largely at the urging of the Chinese and Siamese, then, inducements began to accumulate early in 1981 for formal cooperation among the various groups opposing the Vietnamese and their vassal in Kampuchea. The Chinese and Siamese orchestrated an international campaign that over the course of the year resulted in widespread pressures. The United States, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Australia, and the European Economic Community all promised to provide aid to both Sihanouk's and Sann's groups if they would form a united front coalition of all the resistance groups. The Chinese agreed to increase funding to all three factions if they would unite against the "Vietnamese threat." After seemingly interminable diplomatic maneuvering, face-saving title changes and personnel shuffles, and the bogus dissolution of the Kampuchean Communist Party, the three resistance groups finally agreed in June 1982 to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). The agreement declaring the coalition was a carefully negotiated document designed to preserve the political identities and organizational independence of the three resistance groups. Khieu Samphan, ably representing the interests of the Pol Pot group, insisted on a priority clause preserving the sovereignty of Democratic Kampuchea: "...in the event that an impasse has developed which renders the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea inoperative ... the current state of DK led by Mr. Khieu Samphan will have the right to resume its activities as the sole legal and legitimate state of Kampuchea."¹⁴

In a maze of diplomatic and military maneuvers over the course of the next seven years, the three partners of the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea engaged in such bizarre and convoluted contortions that it became difficult for outside

in the refugee camps run by the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea.¹⁵ Treatment of those Cambodians not directly under NADK control is reportedly harsher yet. As for the armies loyal to Sihanouk and Sann, the NADK's consistent goal has been to liquidate them before they have a chance to grow. The NADK has reveled in ambushing its allies, devising all manner of ruse to entrap and inflict casualties on Sihanouk's ANS and Sann's KPRLF. As if to make the NADK's mission simpler, internal dissension combined with Vietnamese military assaults caused Son Sann's army to virtually disintegrate in 1986-1987. Unfortunately for the Khmer Rouge, however, many of the stragglers rallied to Sihanouk's ANS, which is now stronger than ever.

Nonetheless, the Khmer Rouge have several reasons to believe that their strategy for the Third Indochinese War is succeeding. First, they have survived. Second, they have coopted both socialist patrons (the PRC) and western patrons (ASEAN and the United States) into facilitating their supply for a ten-year long military confrontation with the Vietnamese. Third, they have created the general assumption that the current government cannot survive the withdrawal of the Vietnamese, ensuring a role for the coalition government. Finally, a steady flow of arms and aid has enabled the Khmer Rouge to stockpile firepower for action once the hated hereditary enemy completes its military withdrawal. The Khmer Rouge are well-positioned to begin employment of violence in earnest against contenders to power within Cambodia.

It is apparent then that as states go, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea is indeed an unusual regime. Torn by combat among its factions and possessing little territory and few citizens, it is nonetheless positioned to return in whole or in part to the national capitol by virtue of its two principal resources: Sihanouk's heritage of legitimacy and the Khmer Rouge army. The Khmer Rouge political movement has shown both by its actions and by its declared doctrine for more than twenty years that it believes in force. They take literally Mao's saying that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Thus, Sihanouk was the key to their survival during the decade of exile, when their options for coercion were limited. From Pol Pot's perspective, Sihanouk has already done his job, giving the Khmer Rouge enough international legitimacy to survive the decade-long Vietnamese interregnum. From Sihanouk's perspective, the Khmer Rouge have done their job, driving the Vietnamese army from Cambodia. Their struggle for domestic dominance will continue. But the history of the Indochinese Wars suggests that Sihanouk will not be able to defeat the Khmer

Rouge by himself.

Historical and Theoretical Implications

As we have seen, Cambodian leaders have used exile government organizations both as object and subject. During the First Indochinese War, Norodom Sihanouk's strategy reduced the exile organizations to the status of objects to be manipulated in his geopolitical contest with France. Pol Pot's strategy during the Second Indochinese War made the exile organization the subject, the nexus of the takeover, transmuting it into a regime. The Third Indochinese War has seen a combination of these approaches, with the outcome as yet uncertain. The outcome of the Third Indochinese War hinges, at least in part, on how the indices of legitimacy among the Khmer people have changed across fifty years of conflict.

Comparison of Exile Tactics In Three Indochinese Wars

The long decades of warfare in Indochina during the twentieth century created many crises for the leaders of Cambodia, and on many occasions their response has been to form an exile government. Several points of comparison stand out from this rich history. In all three wars, geographical hosts and financial patrons were keys to success or failure in an exile organizations quest for power. In all three wars, control of the central symbols of nationhood was necessary to carry internal legitimacy and international recognition; successful exile insurgency required at least the sympathy, if not the active support of the King and the monks. Finally, across the three wars, the revolutionary potential of the Khmer people has varied, from moderate in the First Indochinese War, to intense in the Second, to totally absent in the Third. This last observation suggests that a transformation of the indices of legitimacy is in progress among the Khmer body politic.

In the Third Indochinese War, the various factions of the CGDK manifest very different attitudes toward the people. As an organization the CGDK is distinguished by it's lack of a role in the preservation of the diasporic Khmer nation and culture brought on by the last two Indochinese Wars. Democratic Kampuchea made it a special mission to exterminate most aspects of the Khmer nation and culture, so it is not surprising that the DK irredentists have played little role in preserving Khmer culture in the diaspora to which they belong. Sann and Sihanouk's organizations, however, have done much in both the refugee camps and in resettled Khmer exile communities abroad to preserve traditional Khmer religious and social rituals, art, and customs. For

Sihanouk, this is necessary to remind people of his birthright.

There is no way to know what in fact is the will of the people of Cambodia. Certainly the CGDK as an entity cannot be said to speak for the Khmer people. Beyond the common desire for Vietnamese military withdrawal, the CGDK has no coherent program. Son Sann and the factions gathered under his KPNLF umbrella represent some number of Cambodians, as by definition does Democratic Kampuchea. But these claims are negligible, from a cultural or historical perspective, to the symbolic value embodied in the person of Norodom Sihanouk. The prince may still rule the hearts of the people, even though a very high percentage of them were not yet alive during Sihanouk's years in power. Many remember the relative stability of his years in power compared with the years since. It is probably remembered by some as the idyllic jungle paradise of *ante bellum* Cambodian mythology. The symbolic allure of the last, lost sovereign exerts a powerful influence that perhaps even the unprecedented brutality of the Khmer Rouge could not exterminate.

Norodom Sihanouk has flirted with and/or participated in exile governments as a political technique for almost fifty years. It is not surprising, then, that he should once again be found at the center of exile political action in Cambodia. It *would* be surprising if he could ever trust the Khmer Rouge again, or even be expected to deal with them in good faith. He figures that five of his children and fourteen of his grandchildren were killed in various excesses of Democratic Kampuchea. Sihanouk has spent years under house arrest at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, and has seen them tear his "peaceful kingdom" assunder heaven and earth. He describes his coalition partners simply by saying, "They are not like us."¹⁶ Once the Vietnamese have gone, it would not be at all surprising if he finds the State of Cambodia a better prospect for a coalition than his current partner, Democratic Kampuchea.

International Dimension of Strategic Choice

Sihanouk is again positioned to offer himself as the one centrist and only legitimate solution to the decade-old "Kampuchea Problem." But does he still embody the essence of the Khmer nation in his person as he did twenty years ago? On the one side, the domestically illegitimate but internationally recognized Democratic Kampuchea quietly prepares to shoot its way back into power. On the other side, the domestically legitimate but internationally rejected Phnom Penh regime desperately negotiates with anybody who will listen for protection from Pol Pot once the Vietnamese have gone. The Cambodians know what

they want, have known for many years, and are not likely to retreat from their various positions in the near future. Most of the remaining latitude for strategic choice in the Third Indochinese War belongs to outside powers.

The Vietnamese made their choice. Under pressure from a retrenching Soviet Union the Vietnamese accelerated their planned withdrawal from Cambodia. It was a logical decision, and a win-win choice. Militarily, they had passed the point of diminishing returns when the resistance gave up trying to defend fixed installations inside People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) territory. The withdrawal will be popular not only with the Cambodian public and the international community, but also among the Vietnamese army, party and people. If need be, they can always return. But the withdrawal constrains their latitude for future decisions in important ways, reducing the Vietnamese capacity to influence the shape of the next Cambodian government.

The choices available to the United States are also limited by its past actions. It seems unlikely that the United States will sustain its cynical policy of public condemnation and covert support of Democratic Kampuchea through the conclusion of the Third Indochinese War; the Bush administration has shown some signs that a change may already be taking place. However, the lengths to which the US might be willing to go in support of a solution to the Kampuchea Problem again are limited by past actions, and the resulting domestic political realities. US room for maneuver has also been limited by a tendency to defer to the presumably superior regional interests of an important strategic ally, the People's Republic of China.

Thailand has played a crucial role in the survival of the Khmer resistance factions through the Third Indochinese War. The Thais have provided sanctuary to resistance fighters and refugees, acted as host state to their political and military organizations, supplied political and military intelligence, facilitated logistics for foreign military assistance, and exerted limited combat support for border area operations. However, some reports indicate that this type of Thai assistance to the CGDK started to dwindle early in 1989, as Thai generals and politicians began to reassess their interests.¹⁷ The Vietnamese military withdrawal has calmed Thai security concerns, which are beginning to give way to the economic interests flowing from traditional cross-border trade patterns. This shift adds pressure on the CGDK to achieve a settlement before Thai hospitality erodes completely.

The only cards that really matter at the end of the Third

Indochinese War are held by the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese relationship with the Soviet Union may dictate a reduction in tensions that could rebound to the benefit Sihanouk's efforts to build a new coalition. The experience of the First and Second Indochinese Wars, however, is that the Chinese prefer a government in Cambodia that is not just independent of but actually hostile to Vietnam. If the Chinese are consistent in the Third Indochinese War, this will mean continued strong support for an eventual return of the Democratic Kampuchean faction of the resistance to national power in Cambodia.

The limitations on the national sovereignty of People's Republic of Kampuchea — since April 1989 known as the State of Cambodia — are substantial. This is why Prime Minister Hun Sen has been desperately bargaining for Sihanouk's imprimatur. Although the Cambodian leader is the youngest politician in the entire drama, he appears to understand the fundamental fact that domestic legitimation and international recognition are historically conditioned. The People's Republic of Kampuchea was judged guilty by association with Vietnam. The regime could not achieve international recognition, despite a very substantial improvement of the general welfare of the Khmer people. This was the judgment of the international community, apparently in support of the principle that states shall not be overthrown by neighboring force of arms, no matter how unsavory the regime in question. The new "State of Cambodia" has permitted participation by non-communist Khmer leaders such as In Tam, has enshrined in its basic law free market and human rights principles, and has declared anew that Buddhism is the official national religion. To the extent that this "glasnostic" behavior continues, the State of Cambodia may be seen as a transitional regime between the PRK and whatever post-occupation regime emerges.¹⁸

Is the legal Cambodian (exile) regime — Democratic Kampuchea — really a state? Although it lacks control of the national seat of government, Democratic Kampuchea seems to have most of the other traditional attributes of a modern state. DK citizens (refugees and soldiers), international recognition (the UN, etc.), received embassies (ASEAN states, etc.), executive organs (e.g., the Supreme Military Commission), and active governance (again of the camps). Thus, it would seem that Democratic Kampuchea is indeed a state according to traditional definitions. Yet Democratic Kampuchea is not a nation-state. As Aristotle recommended, the nature of a state can be inferred from the nature of its citizens. In this case, the citizens are the literally imprisoned residents of DK controlled camps, and the soldiers of

the NADK. There is no persuasive evidence whatsoever to suggest that the people of Kampuchea at large claim DK as their own, and much evidence to support precisely the contrary proposition. Consistent reports of summary execution are continuing to come from the border areas.¹⁹ This is the same state whose national anthem runs:

*Bright red blood that covers the towns and plains
of Kampuchea, Our Motherland,
Sublime blood of workers and peasants,
Sublime blood of revolutionary men and women
fighters,
The blood changing into unrelenting hatred.²⁰*

Whereas many exile organizations are thought of as stateless nations (e.g., the Palestinians), DK is the case of a nationless state. Representing no more than the will of an elite cadre, a nationless state makes for an excellent pawn in big power geopolitics. If a group as universally notorious as the Khmer Rouge can successfully employ the government-in-exile technique not once, but twice, then the technique may well be an extremely effective form of political action in and of itself.

The organic sources of exile governments seem to lie in the dynamics of international politics. As a mechanism for practitioners of weak power politics to battle the intervention of strong powers, exile government has repeatedly shown itself to be a potent strategy in Indochina. As a mechanism to achieve a voice in national debate for disenfranchised constituencies, however, exile governments in Cambodia have been less effective. On balance, given the environments faced by and the goals of Khmer politicians during all three Indochinese wars, the strategy of exile government has been astonishingly effective. However, as long as stronger neighbors view it as in their interests to manipulate Cambodian politics by funding and supporting insurgent movements, invading Cambodian territory, or otherwise working their will on this weak country, Cambodians can know little peace.

Among Cambodians, Khmer myths are evolving in a way that may be unprecedented in thousands of years of history. Buddhism will never be the same as it always has been in Cambodia; too much of the tradition was lost during the rule of Pol Pot. Neither will the king, his court, and the associated politics ever play the roles they always did in Cambodian affairs; though Sihanouk has a credible heir in Prince Ranaridh, the Khmer Rouge were able to destroy most of the people and

artifacts giving life to the royal tradition. The symbolic extinction of monarchy and monachy will have a profound effect on the future political, social, and psychological topography of Cambodia. What effect this will have on the current struggle will soon become clear.

Conclusion: Exile Government as a Form of Political Struggle

In all three of the major Indochinese conflicts since 1940, Khmer leaders declared formal exile governments. In the First Indochinese War, Norodom Sihanouk used exile groups to achieve independence from France and as a tool for the King to practice his successful authoritarian politics of the center. In the Second Indochinese War, an exile group used Sihanouk to defeat the client regime of the United States, only to lose the hard-won independence to Vietnam in the Third Indochinese War. In that second war, the Khmer Rouge instituted a highly sophisticated strategy, using Sihanouk's prestige to attract peasants to their FUNK organization and international support to their GRUNK exile government, while maintaining control of events with their peasant army. The Khmer Rouge view their exile government in the Third Indochinese War as manifestly tactical, while Sihanouk plays it as a strategic game. The exile organizations arising out of Third Indochinese War may yet make a positive contribution to solution of the tortured "Kampuchean Problem." This constitutes a remarkable record of accomplishment for weak state actors in big power politics. Several factors stand out as significant from a comparison across these experiences: host and patron states, control of the symbols of nationalism, and domestic versus international legitimation.

Consistent geographical hosts and financial and diplomatic patrons are a prerequisite for a successful Khmer exile movement. The lack of steadfast patrons, in and of itself, was sufficient to account for the failures of the exile movements of the First Indochinese War. The Vietnamese in the case of the Khmer Viet Minh, and the Thai's in the case of the Khmer Issarak, both found it in their national interest to abandon support for the exiles' aspirations before the conclusion of the peace. Similarly, analysts credit the considerable assistance of hosts and patrons of Khmer exile movements — the Vietnamese and Chinese in the Second Indochinese War, and the Vietnamese, Thais and the Chinese in the Third — with key roles in the progress of the movements. Vietnamese and Chinese support for GRUNK was essential to success; Vietnamese military support and Chinese diplomatic and financial support made the

difference in the Second Indochinese War. Again, early in the Third Indochinese War, Vietnamese arms brought exiles to power in Cambodia as the People's Republic of Kampuchea. If the CGDK succeeds in becoming a successor government to the PRK, it will be due to the steadfast assistance the coalition has received from Thai hosts and Chinese patrons. Alternatively, shifting Thai perceptions of their interests may force the Khmer exiles of the Third Indochinese War to be repatriated before a solution emerges.

Control of the symbols of nationalism in Cambodia is also crucial to the success of exile movements. For a hundred generations or more, the King of Cambodia has represented to the Khmer people something more than a sovereign. The God-King wields supreme spiritual power as well, and as such, the monarch is the symbolic center of Khmer society. Norodom Sihanouk has played this role during all three major Indochinese conflicts of this century. In the First and Second Indochinese Wars, Sihanouk manipulated these symbols with skill, bringing himself to power in the first war and his coalition partners to power in the second. In the Third Indochinese War, it seems reasonable to expect that the outcome will be consistent with that of the previous two wars, at least in respect to the symbolic potency of the former King.

To make an analogy with mathematics, it seems that in the Khmer case the degree of international legitimation attaching to an exile regime determines the domain or the structure of Cambodian politics, while the degree of domestic legitimacy the exile regime generates determines the range or the process of the politics. In the First Indochinese War, great powers refused to recognize the Khmer exile groups, allowing Sihanouk to dominate the exiles in international negotiations; his claim to domestic legitimacy was strong enough to support his rule for fifteen years. Similarly, in the Second Indochinese War, Sihanouk's participation in the exile coalition lent enough credibility to the exile government for it to win initial international acceptance upon victory in spite of the strong opposition of both the United States and the Soviet Union; on the domestic front, however, the extreme radicalism of the resulting state of Democratic Kampuchea — including an uncompromising program to eradicate all vestiges of the monarchy and Buddhism — soon robbed DK of the Mandate of Heaven. In the Third Indochinese War, the PRK's lack of international recognition assured its eventual failure by creating the conditions necessary to sustain multiple armed challenges to its rule; domestically, after the daily terror in Democratic Kampuchea, the PRK's

moderate policies seemed to be enough to ensure a relative degree of internal stability, even though the PRK was clearly sponsored by Vietnam. Continued foreign sponsorship of multiple armed exile organizations, however, has defined the conflict structure imposed upon Cambodian politics through the 1980s, and beyond.

The key to the success of the Khmer Rouge during their decade in exile has been their very survival. This they owe to their Thai hosts and their Chinese patrons. Although they are able to stroll the halls of the United Nations in New York draped in the flag of their state, at home they are naked emperors. They can claim international recognition, but domestic legitimacy eludes them. The Khmer Rouge record on use-of-force assures that domestic legitimacy will continue to elude them. The Chinese have been careful to ensure that the Khmer Rouge maintain the strongest army of all the Khmer factions, and the Khmer Rouge know what to do with a good coercive apparatus. The successful communist strategy of the Second Indochinese War — control of the coercive apparatus, a broad based united front organization including the symbolic sovereign, and denial of the existence of the party — was redeployed again in the Third Indochinese War.

CGDK strategy for the Third Indochinese War founders on the questions of sustaining internal conflict in Cambodia. When one cuts through all of the diplomatic niceties, the Khmer Rouge remain the legal rulers of Cambodia. According to the over-whelming majority of the members of the United Nations, Democratic Kampuchea is *the* sovereign state of Cambodia. It seems unlikely that the Khmer Rouge will voluntarily relinquish this claim to legitimacy and sovereignty. The only way for them to move from *de jure* sovereignty to *de facto* sovereignty, however, is to resume and sustain violence within Cambodia in the wake of the Vietnamese withdrawal, physically removing competing aspirants to power. This is where the coalition government's strategy loses coherence. With the Vietnamese out, Sihanouk seeks reconciliation among all Khmer while the Khmer Rouge seek to defend the sovereignty of their Democratic Kampuchean state. As the goals of Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge diverge, the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea loses its source of moral — but not legal — legitimacy.

For many years various observers inside Kampuchea and out have urged the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to resolve their differences in such a fashion as to allow a settlement of the "Kampuchea Problem." For seasoned observers of superpower politics, it should come

as no surprise that when these powers finally find it in their interest to begin to move toward a solution, the result would appear to be heading for one of the most cynical and harmful possible outcomes. The Vietnamese decision to pull out before a political settlement has been completed leaves the door open for a return of the Khmer Rouge. The Sino-Soviet Summit of May 1989 left no reason for undue optimism on this score; the final communique of the summit blandly intoned, "The Soviet Union and China affirmed that they will make every effort for an early, fair, and suitable resolution to the Cambodian issue by political moves."²¹ Subsequent efforts by Deng Xiaoping to purge moderates in the Chinese Communist Party positively suggest pessimism; Deng has long been a Pol Pot supporter. Strength on the ground is often decisive and this factor weighs in favor of the Democratic Kampuchean irredentists. Still, Sihanouk's symbolic power is the trump card in Cambodian politics. The stability of any mediated solution to the problem would depend heavily on international guarantees, backed up with force, to alleviate mischief by a revanchist Khmer Rouge. However, experience in other conflicts suggests that peace-keeping troops can only keep a peace that has already been established. The Namibia-style solution proposed by the U.N. Security Council in January 1990 will be severely tested by the Cambodian legacy of political violence. Though the Third Indochinese War may well be drawing to an end, this does not necessarily imply the establishment of peace in Cambodia.

At the present juncture the fate of the people of Kampuchea seems to depend to a large extent on Chinese policy. It is mainly Chinese support that has allowed the Khmer Rouge to endure their defeat and decade of exile, and the Chinese more than anyone else are favorably positioned to effect some control of the Khmer Rouge. Continued Chinese military aid may enable the Khmer Rouge to regenerate their totalitarian control of Cambodia. If the Chinese were to resist the temptation to continue this support, and if a face-saving formula could be found to permit the Phnom Penh factions and the non-communist resistance factions to rally to Sihanouk as a symbol of the center, and if international aid to the new regime was forthcoming to resist Khmer Rouge military encroachments, the Khmer people might yet know peace in this century. But that is a lot of ifs.

The more likely outcome of the Third Indochinese War, consistent with that of the First and Second Wars, is the exile organizations will again succeed in transforming the conditions of Cambodian conflict from external threat to civil war. The

conference convened in Paris in August 1989 — ostensibly called to settle the Third Indochinese War — ended with characteristic ambiguity. Sihanouk resigned as head of the coalition; the Khmer Rouge demonstrated unexpectedly heavy firepower in early dry-season border battles; the Chinese threatened trouble if the Khmer Rouge were excluded from any settlement; and the foreign secretaries of the U.S., U.S.S.R., China and Britain boycotted the final sessions. Summing up the lack of substantive progress at the Paris talks, Sihanouk at one point quipped, "We Khmer love to fight. We'll cooperate later."²² The history of Khmer exile behavior over the course of three Indochinese wars in the last fifty years gives one pause to wonder how much longer the Khmer people will have to wait for cooperation among Khmer leaders, and how much more war lies between now and then.

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FOOTNOTES

¹David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), pp. 180-185.

²See Ben Kiernan, "Resisting the French, 1946-1954: The Khmer Issarak," pp. 127-133 in Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, eds., *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1982).

³Frederick P. Munson, et al., eds., *Area Handbook for Cambodia*, p. 370. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963).

⁴See, for example, Malcolm Caldwell and Lek Tan, *Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War* (New York: Monthly Review Books, 1973).

⁵Timothy Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion*, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper #106, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1977), p. 10.

⁶Norodom Sihanouk, *War and Hope: The Case for Cambodia* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 29.

⁷Quoted in Carney, *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea*, op. cit., p. 29.

conference convened in Paris in August 1969 — ostensibly called to settle the Third Indochinese War — ended with characteristic ambiguity. Sihanouk resigned as head of the coalition, the Khmer Rouge demonstrated (unexpectedly heavy) firepower in early dry-season border battles; the Chinese threatened trouble if the Khmer Rouge were excluded from any settlement; and the 9 great Secretaries of the U.S., U.S.S.R., China and Britain boycotted the final sessions. Summing up the lack of significant progress at the Paris talks, Sihanouk wrote a final statement: "We Khmer love to fight. We love to fight later." The history of Khmer exile behavior over the course of three Indochinese wars in the last fifty years gives best cause to wonder how much longer the Khmer people might be able to cooperate among Khmer leaders, and how much more will be between now and then.

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FOOTNOTES

¹David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 120-125.

²See Ben Korman, "Resisting the Breuch," in *Resistance: The Khmer Issarak*, pp. 127-133 in Ben Korman and Yoon Kwon, eds., *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1982).

³Frederick F. Morton, et al., eds., *Asia and the Pacific in Cambodia*, p. 370 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963).

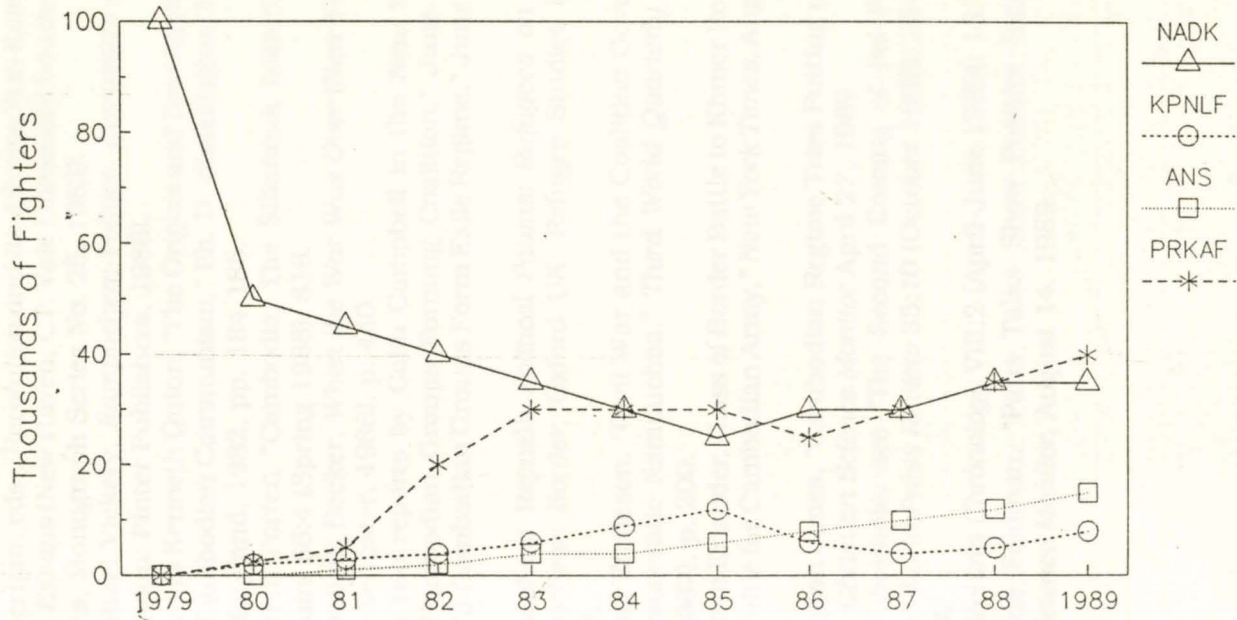
⁴See, for example, Malvern Caldwell, *War and Revolution in Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War* (New York: World Review Books, 1973).

⁵Timothy Carney, *Communist Party Power in Cambodia: Documents and Discussion*, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper #166 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1977), p. 10.

⁶Konradin Sihanouk, *War and Hope: The Case for Cambodia* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 29.

⁷See also Yoon Kwon, *Communist Party Power in Cambodia*, op. cit., p. 29.

FORCE LEVELS OF KHMER ARMIES in the Third Indochinese War



Estimates by Author

⁸See Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*, (London: Pinter Publishers, 1984), pp. 153-162.

⁹Chanthou Boua, "Observations of the Heng Samrin Government, 1980-1982," pp. 259-290 in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., *Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series No. 25, 1983).

¹⁰Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1986).

¹¹Cited in Kenneth Quinn, "The Origins and Development of Radical Cambodian Communism," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1982, pp. 184-185.

¹²Gareth Porter, "Cambodia: The Sihanouk Initiative." *Foreign Affairs* 66:4 (Spring 1988): 816.

¹³Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 440.

¹⁴See two reports by Colin Campbell in the *New York Times*, "3 Cambodian Groups Forming Coalition," June 21, 1982; and "3 Cambodian Groups Form Exile Regime," June 23, 1982.

¹⁵Josephine Reynell, *Political Pawns: Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean Border*, Oxford UK: Refugee Studies Program, 1989.

¹⁶Craig Etcheson, "Civil War and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea," *Third World Quarterly* 9:1 (January 1987), p. 200.

¹⁷Steven Erlander, "Loss of Border Battle to Khmer Rouge Signals Trouble for Cambodian Army," *New York Times*, August 20, 1989.

¹⁸Clayton Jones, "Cambodian Regime Tries Putting on a New Face." *Christian Science Monitor* April 27, 1989.

¹⁹For example, see "The Second Coming of Pol Pot," reprinted in *World Press Review* 35:10 (October 1988): 25-26.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Indochina Chronology* VIII:2 (April-June 1989): 13.

²²Linda Feldman, "Paris Talks Show Positive Signs," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 1989.